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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 NEW DELHI 002360

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SUBJECT: DELHI DIARY, MAY 10-17

Classified By: PolCouns Ted Osius for Reasons 1.4 (B,D)

¶1. (U) Below is a compilation of political highlights from Embassy New Delhi for May 10-17, 2007 that did not feature in our other reporting, including:

- Handicapping the Presidential Race
- The Mysterious Process of Indian Presidential Elections
- Next Phase of India-Pakistan Composite Dialogue
- Integrated Defense Staff Chief Points Finger at U.S. for Lack of Defense Sales
- Spiritual Organization in Punjab Stirs Up Communal Tensions
- To Curb Trafficking, Women Under 30 Banned from Working in the Gulf

Handicapping the Presidential Race

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¶2. (C) Now that the Uttar Pradesh (UP) election is over, attention has shifted to the race for the Presidency. The term of President A.P.J. Abdul Kalam expires in July and five names have emerged as the prime contenders. According to press reports, Congress has approached its United Progressive Alliance (UPA) allies (and the Left Front) with three names: External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee, Power Minister Sushil Kumar Shinde and ex-Maharajah and Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Karan Singh. Our Communist and Congress Party contacts say the Left favors Pranab Mukherjee or Sushil Shinde, and has ruled out the former Maharajah, whose royal blood is anathema. Some reports speculate that some Communists are pushing for the election of Lok Sabha Speaker Somnath Chatterjee. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) would like to promote Vice President Bhairon Singh Shekawat into the top job, although some are also suggesting former PM Atal Bihari Vajpayee. One opposition Member of Parliament (MP) told us Vajpayee is toying with the idea, and could also be a popular choice.

¶3. (C) The UP election outcome has changed the dynamics. The humiliation of the BJP in UP has reduced its influence over the selection process. It now appears that Congress will work closely to select a "secular" candidate favorable to all non-BJP parties. A front-runner seems to be Foreign Minister Pranab Mukherjee. Although a Congressman, Mukherjee is a Bengali like much of the Communist leadership and has

worked closely with the Communists in his home state for many years. Mayawati, who now has a large influence over the selections, may acquiesce. The Communists have taken a lead role in the selection process and have been instrumental in arranging the "consensus" required. Communist leader Sitaram Yechury told PolCouns May 17 that the Left was determined to push for a politician, who understands parliament and party dynamics, so that he can act appropriately to help form a government after the 2009 parliamentary elections. If Mukherjee were elected, he would no longer be a rival to PM Singh, or to pretenders such as Arjun Singh or Home Minister Shivraj Patel. The process remains fluid, and is a barometer of UPA coalition health, so watch this space.

#### Unraveling the Mysterious Process of Indian Presidential Elections

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¶4. (U) The President is elected by an electoral college consisting of (a) elected members of both houses of Parliament (MPs), and (b) elected members of the legislative assemblies of the states (MLAs)(including New Delhi and Pondicherry, and excluding all other union territories.) Each electoral college member has a vote value. This vote value is determined as follows:

¶5. (U) For an MP, the vote value is fixed at 708 per member. There are 776 MPs (Lok Sabha 543 Rajya Sabha 233), therefore the total value of parliamentary votes would be 549,408, or 708 multiplied by 776. (Note: Nominated members cannot vote. End note.)

¶6. (U) For an MLA, the vote value is the total population of

NEW DELHI 00002360 002 OF 003

the state (based upon the 1971 census) divided by one thousand times the number of elected legislators. For example, the vote value of an MLA from Andhra Pradesh (AP) would be calculated as:

¶7. (U) The population of AP in 1971 was 43,502,708, and the number of MLAs 294; therefore, the vote value of each MLA would be  $43,502,708/294,000 = 147.96$  (rounded off to 148).

¶8. (U) Thus, a legislator from a more populous state like UP would have greater vote value as compared to one from a less populated state, such as Sikkim.

¶9. (U) On the day of polling, a secret ballot is conducted in the Parliament House and in the State Assemblies. The results are announced the next day.

¶10. (U) Political parties try to evolve a consensus while making a choice for the President. This is not to say that no contest occurs for the position. It does occur every time, but one can deduce the winner (invariably, the candidate supported by the party or group ruling at the center) well before the actual polling date.

#### Next Phase of India-Pakistan Composite Dialogue

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¶11. (C) India and Pakistan announced on May 12th the dates for the working-level fourth round of Composite Dialogue. The first will be Home Secretary level talks on terrorism and drug trafficking in New Delhi on June 3rd and 4th. The second will be between Indian and Pakistani Water Resources Secretaries on the Tulbal Navigation Project (or Wullar

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Barrage, as Pakistan calls it) on June 26th and 27th in New Delhi. (Note: This dispute is over a project India started in 1984 to build a barrier on the Jhelum River across the mouth of the Wular Lake near Srinagar to aid in navigation of the waterway during dry months between October and February. While the Government of Pakistan says the structure would

&control8 the water from the Jhelum River flowing to Pakistan, violating the Indus Water Treaty of 1960, the Government of India says it is only "impounding" the waters to build a navigation structure and therefore would not violate the treaty. End note.) On June 28th and 29th, the two sides will hold Cultural Secretary talks in Islamabad on &friendly exchanges in various fields.<sup>8</sup> Commerce Secretary-level talks will then be held on economic and

#### SIPDIS

commercial cooperation in New Delhi from July 31st to August 1st, followed by a meeting of the joint study group on August 2nd. Traditionally, India and Pakistan have not released the results of the working-level phase of Composite Dialogue until the final Foreign Minister-level phase of the talks, which is held at the end of each round.

#### Integrated Defense Staff Chief Points Finger at U.S. for Lack of Defense Sales

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¶12. (C) Integrated Defense Staff (IDS) chief General Lidder received our visiting White House Fellows May 16, and offered a refreshingly candid, albeit personal and not necessarily upbeat, assessment of India's military and our bilateral security relationship. In response to a question about how we can enhance our defense cooperation, Lidder immediately went on the offensive, placing the blame for a lack of defense sales on the U.S. Citing a four-year old Foreign Military Sales order for special operations equipment, which he claimed was made not because the U.S. had superior equipment but because India was looking to build a relationship, Lidder stated the order is still unfulfilled and suggested the U.S. is unreliable as a supplier. "You need to honor a contract," he said, telling the questioner to go back and get the facts on the U.S. as a supplier in the past. He also complained about excessive American export laws.

¶13. (C) Asked about Afghanistan, Lidder said India was ready to put boots on the ground right now, but immediately warned that such a move would forever change the equation in South

NEW DELHI 00002360 003 OF 003

Asia, as India would expect to stay in Afghanistan to assure it doesn't become "a jihadi factory" again. He did not expect Indian troops to be invited anyway, and added India is happy to let NATO "drain the swamp."

¶14. (C) Comment: It's important to note that Lidder was providing the White House Fellows with his personal views, and his comments certainly deviated from official Government of India policy, but nevertheless it was an interesting and candid perspective on this important Indian official's thinking. On other topics, General Lidder gave an inspiring definition of leadership. Two quotes of note: "The only method that works in a crisis is 'follow me,' but you, as leader, have to be ready to walk into the fire;" and, on being an armed soldier, "When time comes for you to play God, will you be ready to accept it?" He also offered good advice on how to battle insurgencies, and said the Indian army does not place women in combat positions because it values them too much. The Fellows were treated to an insightful hour. End Comment.

#### Spiritual Organization in Punjab Stirs Up Communal Tensions

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¶15. (U) On May 12, Sant Gurmeet Singh Ram Rahim, the head of the Dera Sacha Sauda spiritual sect, allegedly committed blasphemy by dressing up as the tenth Guru of Sikhism. By May 14, Sikhs brandishing swords took to the streets throughout Punjab and burned effigies of Rahim. Over the course of three days, the protests, resulting in small, isolated incidents of violence, had spread from Punjab to Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarkhand, Madhya Pradesh and New Delhi. The press reported clashes between Dera supporters

and Sikh protesters.

¶16. (SBU) Having just taken office in February 2007, Punjab Chief Minister Prakash Singh Badal is blaming the Congress party for stirring up communal tensions in the state to destabilize his new government. Dera Sacha Sauda did support the Congress in the previous election; however, UPA Home Minister Shivraj Patil is assuring support to Punjab in containing the violence and bringing peace back to the state.

Rahim is an eccentric character who likes to dress up when he appears in public. Rahim claims that he was not dressed up as the tenth Guru and the entire episode is a mistake. However, he declared he will not apologize since, "his people are being attacked."

Women Under 30 Banned from Working in the Gulf

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¶17. (SBU) To curb trafficking, the GOI has reportedly banned women under 30, ostensibly seeking work as domestic help in foreign lands, from emigrating to countries that require emigration clearance. This ban will affect receiving states in the Gulf (Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, UAE, Kuwait, Qatar, Oman), Malaysia, Syria, Jordan, Afghanistan, Thailand, Indonesia, Iraq, Brunei, Nigeria, Sudan, and Libya. The good news is that the Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD) is now talking to the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs about trafficking into abusive labor situations. The bad news is that there is now a heavy-handed proposed ban which includes an unenforceable requirement that Indian nationals turn in their passports to Indian embassies overseas as a form of protection (based on a model used by Singapore). The move was prompted by MWCD Minister Renuka Chowdhury after she had returned from Kuwait. INL notes that Chowdhury has made other public pronouncements in the past that, while coming from the right place, were not well thought out and never became public policy. (Note: While media is reporting the ban as a done deal, we suspect it is still just a proposal. End note.)

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